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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes


The Madeline Davis Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project

Meeting Minutes

Jan. 8, 2018

Dramatis Personae: Adrienne, Melissa, Brigitte, Marielle, Ana, Dani, Nissa, Jessie, Tanja, Carolyn, Amanda

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1. Meeting times and places
2. First event of the year: Historical Dance Party!
3. A newly expanded archiving team--and a new website.

Meeting Times and Places:

Happy New Year, and welcome back to the Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project! It's been a while since we last held a public meeting: the last few months of 2017 were open only to long-time members of the organization, to hash out some boring organizational stuff.

One of the things we talked about during those months was changing meeting times. For much of last year, it was hard to get people to come to meetings, and we determined that this is because our old meeting time, the last Thursday of the month, is a stressful, overloaded, generally awful time to hold a meeting. We determined that the second week of the month would be much better, and Nissa agreed to put a survey up on our Facebook group to see what days would be best for current and potential members.

According to that survey, the best times for our members to meet are Sunday late morning/early afternoon, and Tuesday evening. By chance this month, we held our meeting on Tuesday evening. So, we spent some time at the beginning of the meeting talking about whether we wanted to continue meeting Tuesday evenings.

Responses were mixed. Some members said they preferred Tuesdays--Nissa, for instance said that she "prefers Sundays in theory, and Tuesdays in practice." However, Tuesday doesn't work for some members. Marielle asked if we could push our meeting time up to 5:30, because she has to put her kids to bed early; however, Adrienne, who usually drives her to meetings, doesn't think she could get to Marielle's home that early. Our new archivist Melissa, meanwhile, says that she wouldn't be able to get to meetings before 7 p.m.

We didn't really make an ultimate decision at this meeting; we just agreed to try this time for another month or two and see how it goes. If you have any feedback on meeting times, please feel free to comment in the thread below the Facebook post where these meetings will go up, or send an email to bfolgbtqhistory@gmail.com.

We talked a bit about meeting places, too. Carolyn, who is usually in charge of sending out invites to our meetings, admitted that she has been "not great" at getting Facebook invites ready. As a new semester begins, she is afraid she will be even worse. She asked if we could either hold meetings at the same venue for 3 months in a row, or if we could brainstorm meeting venues for the next three months.

We talked about some solutions: looking into public libraries as a meeting space; having Carolyn appoint someone else as a co-host so that they could change details more quickly than she sometimes can. In general, our solutions are as follows: Carolyn will make Facebook invites for the next 3 months now, with locations TBD. Nissa will look into the possibility of using libraries as meeting places, while Dani will provide Carolyn with additional venues for meetings.

TL;DR Version: We're changing our meeting times to the second Tuesday of the month for now. If you don't like that, speak now or forever hold your peace. Also, Carolyn could use some ideas for new meeting locations.

Assignments:

- *Carolyn:* Make Facebook invites for the next three meetings with locations TBD. Appoint a co-host for these invites.
- *Nissa:* Look into logistics and possible costs for meeting at branches of the Erie County Library.
- *Dani:* Come up with four venues that Carolyn could possibly use for History Project meetings.
- *Everyone:* Let us know if Tuesdays are a good meeting date for you.

Historical Dance Party:

Recap from last month: As a group, our goal for the year is to put on four events. Like last year, our first event for the year will commemorate Black History Month (though at this rate, it doesn't look like it will be in February--we're aiming more for mid-March). It'll be a historical dance party-- in one room of the venue, we'll put together an exhibit of artifacts from house parties, bars, public parties, etc. that sustained Buffalo's Black LGBTQ community over the years. In another room, we'll have a DJ playing music that was popular at those parties. We're hoping to go as far back as the 1930s-40s, with a focus on 1970 to the present.

At last month's meeting, we decided that our goals were:

- To talk to Denise and Tinamarie Sweet about holding the event at Sweets Lounge.
- To talk to various members and organizations that hold prominent places in Buffalo's Black LGBTQ community, to ask them if they'd like to be co-planners of the event, and/or if they would like to share artifacts or help us come up with a song playlist.
- To do some archival research into Buffalo's Black LGBTQ community.

Here's how those goals are proceeding:

Venue. Dani, Ana, and Adrienne spoke to Denise Sweet in mid-December, and Denise is all about having the event at Sweets. She also wants to help us promote it, and had a couple names of DJs she thought would be interested in working with us. (This is probably one of our next goals: to lock down a DJ for the event.) As far as sound equipment goes, Denise let us know that the DJs she recommends would all bring their own sound equipment.

Partnerships. So far, the following people/orgs have expressed interest in working with us:

- *Black Intelligent Ladies Alliance (BILA).* In addition to running Sweets Lounge, Denise Sweet founded BILA. As part of putting the event together goes, she said she would talk with other BILA members about their memories of various venues (mostly the 134), and Adrienne made a flyer to help her do that. The issue is, while Denise seems up for helping, it's unclear whether other BILA members are interested, as well. Members of the History Project spoke to Denise right before the meeting, and she said she hadn't had any luck getting any stories or artifacts.
- *Black Men Talking.* Marielle, Adrienne, and Ana recently spoke with Robert Hairston, as well as his friend Bill, both of whom are longtime members of Black Men Talking. Both men have expressed interest in collecting memories for the event, and getting BMT involved. (Bill even suggested an alternative name for the event: "Black in Time.") They asked us to come up with a more concrete plan for the event, and to get back to them in a week or so.
- *Ari Moore.* Ana and Adrienne met with Ari Moore. She said that she was going to find pictures from assorted parties and clubs, and that she has a lot of stories. We don't want to push her to participate in every second event, but if our past events are any indication, she'll probably come and give the audience some education, whether we explicitly make her a host or not. 😊
- People and groups that we talked about contacting, but haven't yet, include: Madeline Davis, DOPE Collective ("Give me a few more days," says Dani), Reggie Griggs, John Morrison, and Unity Fellowship Church. Robert Hairston also mentioned remaining members of SHADES; Adrienne can try and reach out to her supposed contact in SHADES once more. Robert and Bill also suggested Ebony Johnson; we'd love her input, but don't want her to feel like she has to engage in labor for us every time we hold a Black History Month event.

Research. We have attempted to conduct research on local venues for Black LGBTQ folks and the music they played, but so far, we have had no luck. Here is a brief list of our failures:

- *Madeline Davis Archives.* Adrienne sent a message to Dan and Hope, the archivists in charge of the Madeline Davis Archives, back in December, but never heard anything back. It would be best to talk to them in person, but since the archives are open between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Adrienne can't go in person. At the meeting, Melissa volunteered to go in person. Adrienne will send her the list of archival materials and Dan's and Hope's (the archivists') emails.
- *Merriweather Library.* Ana, Dani, and Adrienne visited the archives in the Merriweather Library, and found them not very helpful. The librarian didn't know of any materials that addressed Black LGBTQ life head-on, but directed us to some other materials that might contain helpful information if we read between the lines. The problem is, the materials Merriweather Library advertises itself as having are not the same as the materials it actually has. When we requested a look at some of their

microfilm, it turned out that much of it was not actually on site.

- *Digital archives.* Nissa looked into some local digital archives--namely in the *Buffalo Criterion* and the Little Harlem Hotel archives. She didn't find much. She does have lists of top hits dating all the way back to the 1940s, but fears those are too white.

Based on what we have done so far, the group decided that our most useful next step would be to come up with a clearer structure for the event, and then to gather our partners together at a single meeting to decide how to move forward. Here is what we decided:

- We will still have a small exhibit in the back room of Sweets, but we would like to also have a projector in the front room of the bar, projecting photos from assorted venues.
- We will begin every hour of the party with a few people telling/sharing stories. Ideally, the party will be chronological--every hour brings the stories and then the music of a new decade. This means we need to figure out which decades we have represented among the storytellers we recruit.
- Amanda came up with the idea of having a place--maybe a book?--to compile stories. People who want to can read stories from the book; people who are too nervous to speak in public can provide stories for others to read.
- In previous meetings, we talked about having young queer artists of color present installment art as a response to the archival materials. Although we love that idea in theory, we just don't have enough time to get all those moving parts in place by the time of the event. We are not giving up the idea, but the display of works by artists will be a separate event, to be carried out at a separate time. Bonus: if we move the event to the fall, we can get Public Humanities money for it, and pay the artists.
- Of all the DJs recommended to us by assorted people, it seems like Richard Stepney might be the best for our purposes. We will reach out to him through Black Men Talking. We still need to decide whether we will have an MC.

Our major goal for this month, then--and really, within the next 7-10 days--is to meet with all the individuals and organizations who have expressed interest in collaborating on this event, share our vision for this event with them, and come up with a collective strategy on how to move forward. Ana has volunteered to set up this meeting. Adrienne, Ana, Carolyn, Dani, and Nissa have all agreed to represent the History Project at this meeting; if you would like to be involved as well, please let the History Project know by Facebook or email.

TL;DR version: We have some local partners who are interested in working on the historical dance party with us, but they've asked us to come up with a clearer vision for the event and communicate it with them. At the meeting, we worked on that clearer vision. Now, we are planning a meeting with those partners.

Assignments:

- *Adrienne:*
 - Reach out to additional would-be collaborators for this event.

- Send Melissa the Madeline Davis Archives master list, and Dan and Hope's email addresses.
 - Attend meeting with event partners.
- *Melissa:*
 - Begin research in Madeline Davis Archives.
- *Amanda:*
 - Brainstorm ideas for collecting/curating stories for event.
- *Ana:*
 - Set up meeting with event partners.
 - Attend meeting with event partners.
 - Reach out to additional would-be collaborators for this event.
- *Carolyn:*
 - Attend meeting with event partners.
- *Dani:*
 - Attend meeting with event partners.
 - Reach out to additional would-be collaborators for this event.
- *Nissa:*
 - Attend meeting with event partners.

Archive Digitization Project:

We have a new member on our digital archiving team! Melissa hails from Cleveland, where she worked on the People's Archive of Police Violence for 3 years. She has some new thoughts on how to organize and display our digital archives, and she is now working with Brigitte to make those a reality.

Brigitte and Melissa suggest that we make a new website--one that uses Omeka. Omeka is kind of like Wordpress--it's a content management system, but is specifically for archiving. You can use it to not only store archival material, but to create exhibits out of your digital collections.

The default version of Omeka is free, but you can pay to buy your own web host and add storage space. Brigitte initially suggested that we pay at the cheapest level--\$35/year for 2 GB--but Nissa says her OneDrive has 10 GB of archival material on it, so the two of them will look into the matter further.

We can--and probably should--do some front-end web design to the new website to make it look more attractive. Brigitte has messaged Phoenix about helping with the design, but Phoenix just started school and is super busy. Amanda says she is experienced in web design and can help, so she, Brigitte, and Melissa will talk about that further, while keeping Phoenix in the loop as much as possible.

One possible future project: at the meeting with Black Men Talking members for the historical dance party, Robert and Bill mentioned to us that they would like to make an archive for their organization. Brigitte is interested in offering the group's services to digitize the BMT archives if they're interested, so Adrienne will reach out to Robert on that issue.

TL;DR Version: We're building a new website to make it easier for us to display archival material. And we've got a new team member, Melissa, to help us with the process.

Assignments:

- *Brigitte:*
 - Talk to Nissa about how much storage we need for the new website.
 - Work with Melissa on transferring our archival materials to Omeka.
 - Talk with Amanda and Phoenix about web design.
- *Melissa:*
 - Work with Brigitte on transferring our archival materials to Omeka.
 - Probably be part of the conversations with Nissa, Amanda, and Phoenix, too.
- *Amanda:*
 - Talk to Brigitte/Melissa about web design.
- *Adrienne:*
 - Ask Robert Hairston if BMT would like help digitizing their archives.